

# Collaborative volunteer training

## Background

Since 2009, Alzheimer's Society and Asthma UK have worked together to deliver training to their research volunteers. Training involves interactive sessions to introduce research as a cycle and run through the key stages of the research process. Participants also attend a session with the particular charity they support. In previous years, other charities have also collaborated, including MS Society and Epilepsy Action.



## Planning the research

This interactive session aims to demonstrate the steps involved in the research planning process. Participants are required to step into a researcher's shoes and plan their own study. We begin with a fictitious observation that families in France who grow up near vineyards tend not to catch colds. In groups, participants plan a series of studies, starting with this observation and eventually leading to the development of a cure for the common cold, with each study building on the findings of the previous group.

## Learning outcomes

- Biomedical and health research process
- Role of patients and members of the public at all stages of the research cycle
- Challenges faced by researchers
- Vital role patients play within each charity's research programme
- Diversity of patient and carer experiences.

## Benefits of collaboration

- Ensuring a **diverse mix of participants and perspectives**
- Focusing on the **principles of involvement** rather than the condition
- **Sharing costs**, allowing organisations to offer face-to-face training
- Ensuring **consistency** in training despite staff turnover
- Allowing **knowledge sharing** between organisations
- Fostering useful **links between organisations** beyond this training

## Lessons learned

- Face-to-face training promotes **peer support, confidence amongst volunteers and staff**
- Establishing **ground rules** prevents difficulties of working with different patient groups
- Organising **mixed tables** encourages sharing of different experiences
- Need to **effectively plan for and manage** different personality types
- Running sessions on **different days of the week** increases turnout
- **Sharing presentations amongst staff** improves participant concentration
- Accepting **questions during presentations** allows participants to check understanding of content but can lead to issues surrounding timing
- **Extending the charity-specific session** helps participants to contextualise their learning

## Grant review case study

Feedback from the first three years suggested that volunteers would like to practice reviewing grants with each other during the training. Since 2013, Alzheimer's Society have included a mock grant review activity, aiming to improve the quality of lay reviews, increase participants' confidence in their role and allow them to apply their learning in practice. The activity is regularly cited as one of the best parts of the day.

The joint training sessions have received overwhelmingly positive feedback. We are currently interested in developing refresher training and expanding training sessions across the UK, potentially with new charitable partners. We would love to hear from you so please get in touch with us.

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